



Regional Planning in Rural and Small Town Contexts

June 9, 2011

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What I Will Cover

- What is rural planning?
 - Definitions
 - Issues facing rural regions
- Case studies
 - Union County, PA
 - New River Valley Region, VA
- Conclusion: Key Challenges

What is Rural Planning? – Definitions

- **Sustainable Communities Regional Planning Grants**
 - Small-sized regions, rural communities, and small town areas with less than 200,000 people
- **Census Bureau / Office of Management and Budget**
 - Defined by “exclusion” – any area that is not metro/urban is nonmetro/rural
 - Generally includes open country and small settlements of less than 2,500 outside of urban clusters
 - In 2000 rural America comprised 2,052 counties, 75% of the nation’s land, and 49 million people or 17% of its population (OMB 2003)
- **Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary “rural” definition**
 - Of or relating to the country, country people or life, or agriculture

What is Rural Planning? – Common Elements

- **Characteristics of rural places**
 - Size
 - Resources
 - Character / quality of life
- **Rural planning issues**
 - Resource protection
 - Rural economic development
 - Managing growth pressures in urbanizing regions
 - Capacity



Typical Issues Facing Rural Regions

- Farmland preservation / maintaining the agricultural industry
- Impacts of resource extraction
- Impacts of scattered development on rural resources
- Development pressures (tourism, second homes) in “gateway” communities
- Costs of providing infrastructure and services
- Economic opportunity / jobs for rural residents
- Small town revitalization
- Limited transportation options
- Jurisdictional fragmentation
- Limited capacity for planning

Union County, PA Comprehensive Plan



January 2008 Municipal Officials Meeting

**Listen to the WKOK Roundtable discussion
on Cultivating Community**



Share Your Passion for Union County

Union County has embarked on a new planning process that will shape its future. The process will result in a new comprehensive plan for the County and multi-municipal plans for three regions within the County, intended to guide decision-makers in managing future growth, promoting sustainable economic development, and preserving its rural landscape.

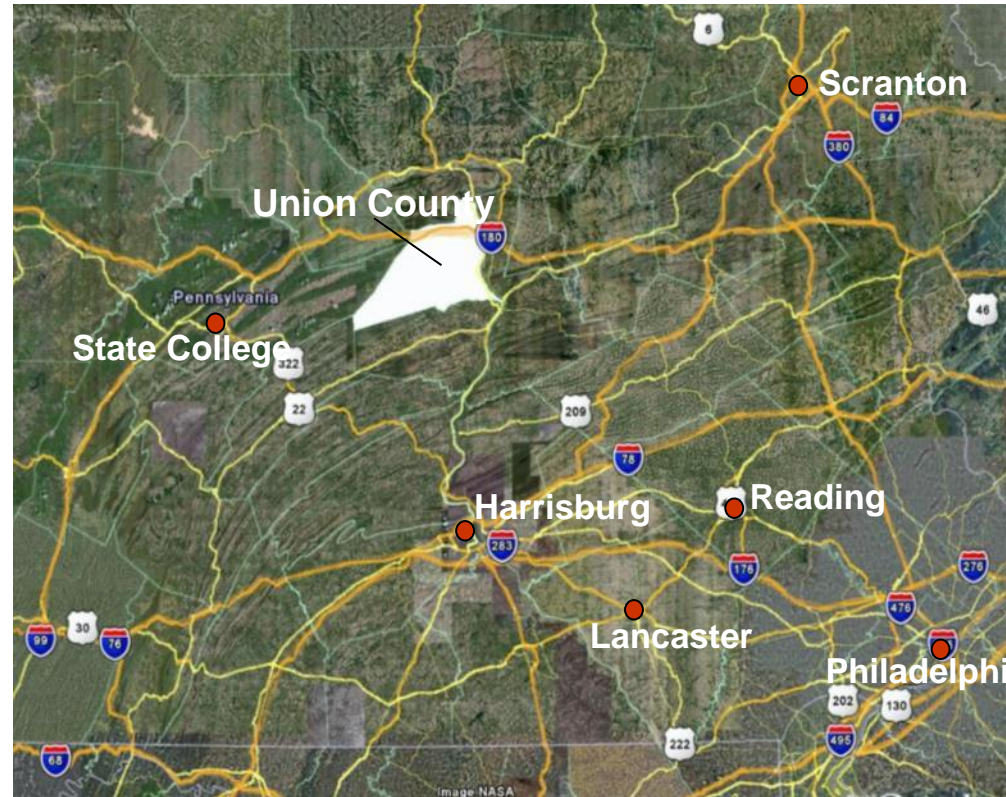
However, the success of the project depends on you. Meaningful public input will increase the effectiveness of the plan and the probability of its success. We invite you to share your passion for Union County by getting involved and voicing your opinion.

For more information about the comprehensive plan and the planning process, [click here](#).

This is your future. What do you want it to look like?

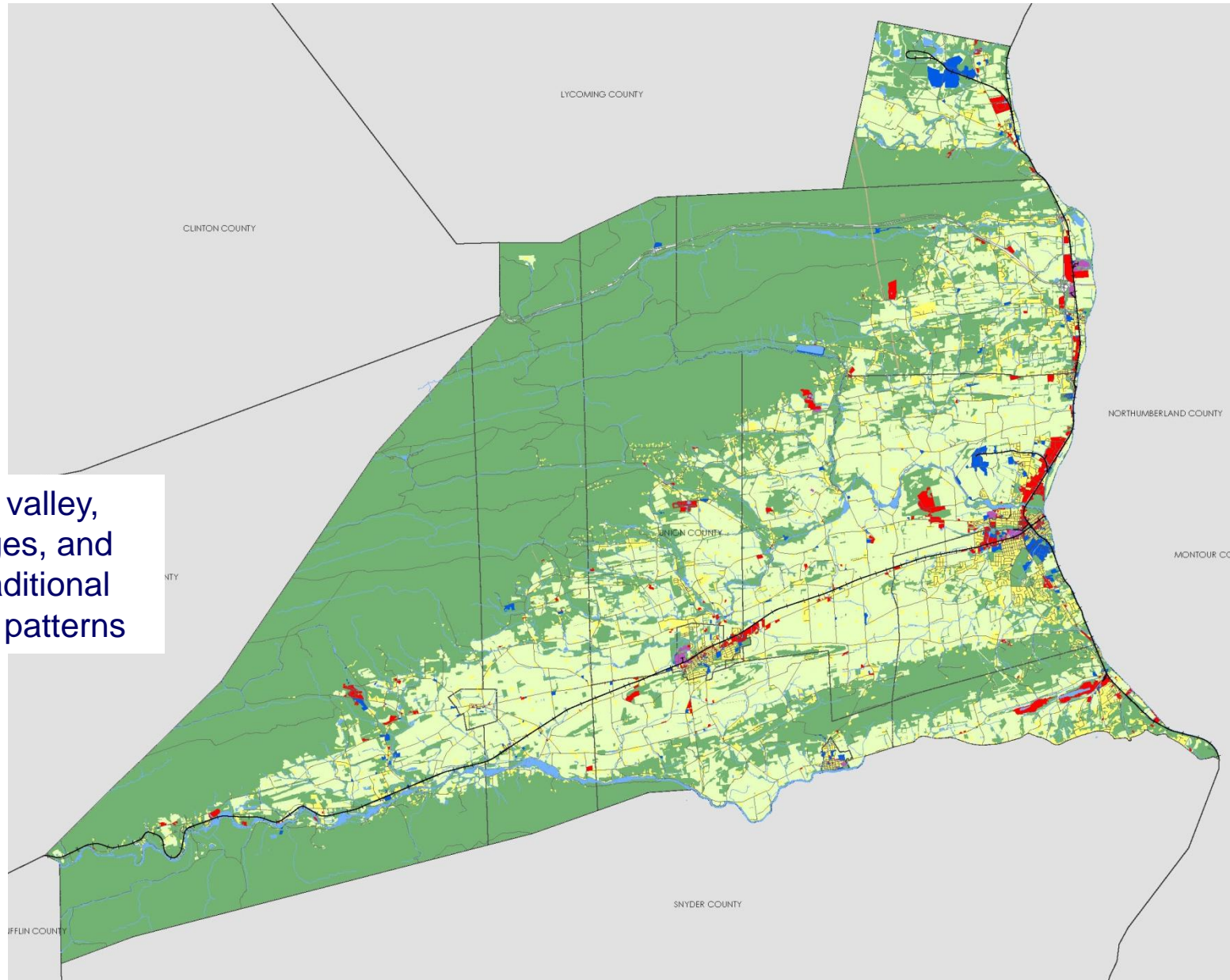
Union County Background

- **Small county in central PA**
 - Population = 44,947
 - Largest town = Lewisburg (pop. 5,620)
- **Rural quality of life**
 - Agricultural economy
 - Small towns / villages
 - Surrounded by state forest lands, Susquehanna River
- **Regional planning**
 - Comprehensive Plan led by Union County Planning Commission
 - Multi-municipal plans for 3 planning areas (13 jurisdictions)



Existing Land Use

Agricultural valley,
forested ridges, and
compact, traditional
development patterns

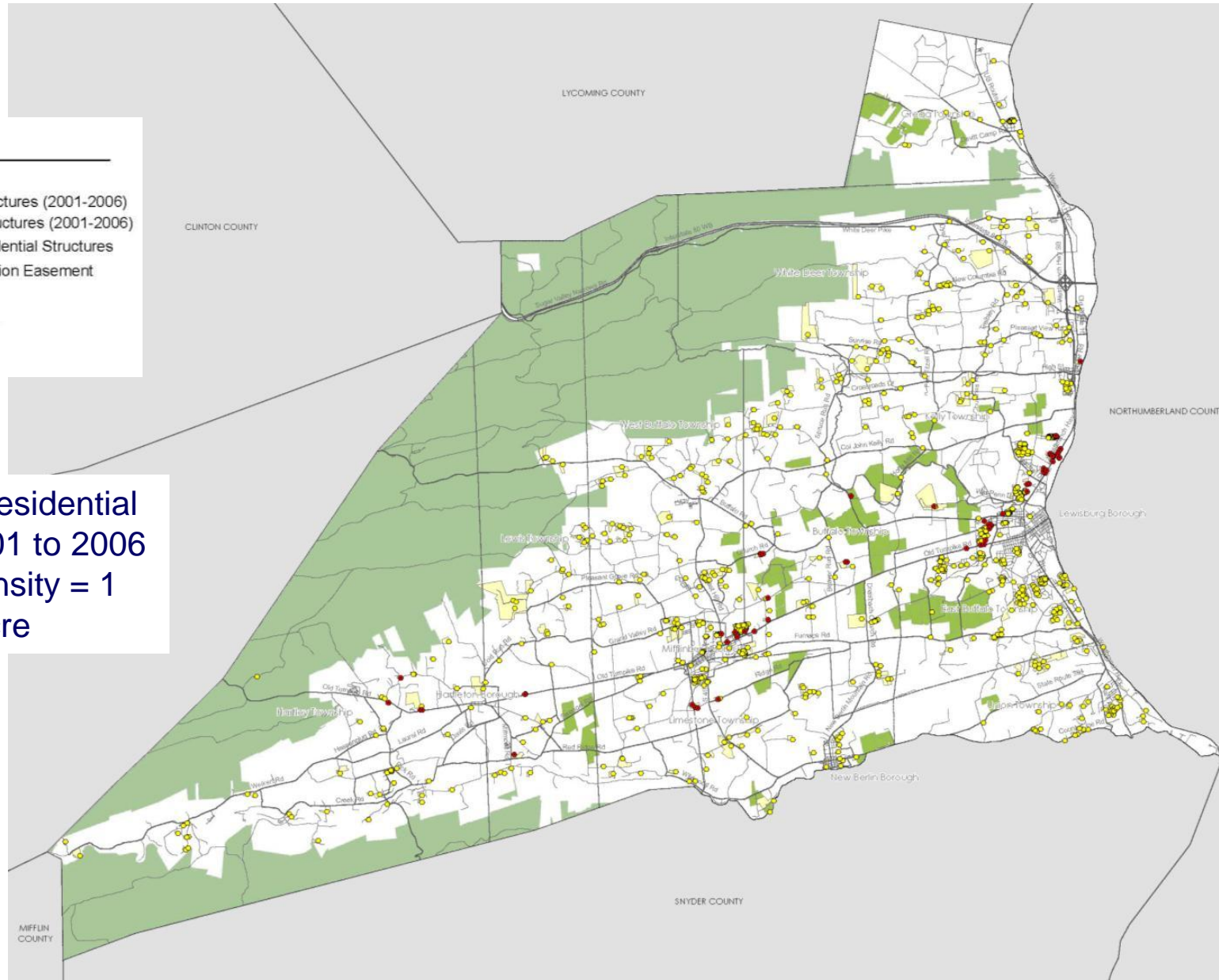


Recent Development Trends

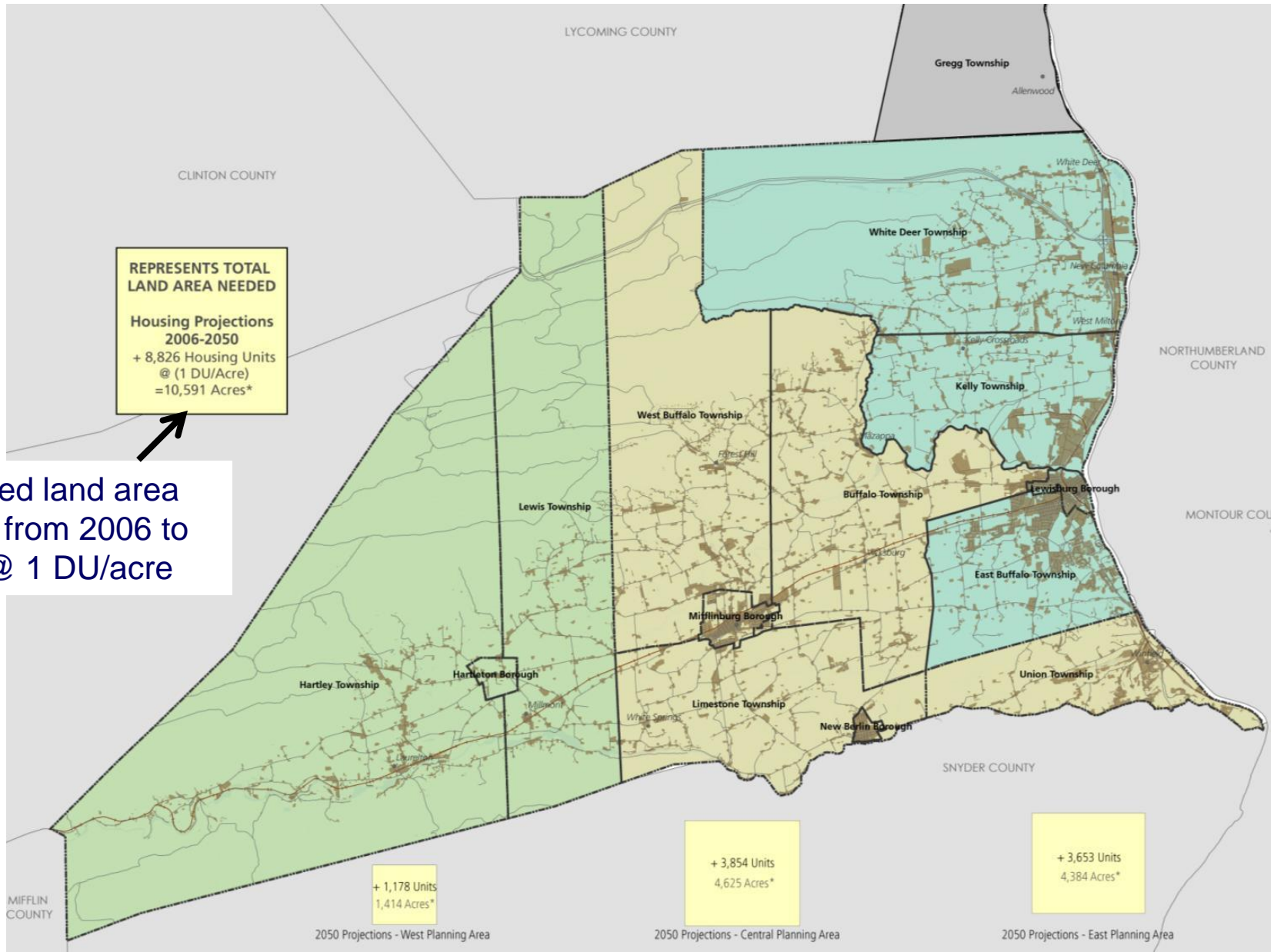
LEGEND

- New Residential Structures (2001-2006)
- New Commercial Structures (2001-2006)
- Parcels w/ New Residential Structures
- Agricultural Preservation Easement
- State Forest
- ▭ Municipal Boundaries
- Roads

1,000+ new residential
units from 2001 to 2006
Average density = 1
DU/acre



Projected Future Development



Reaching the Public

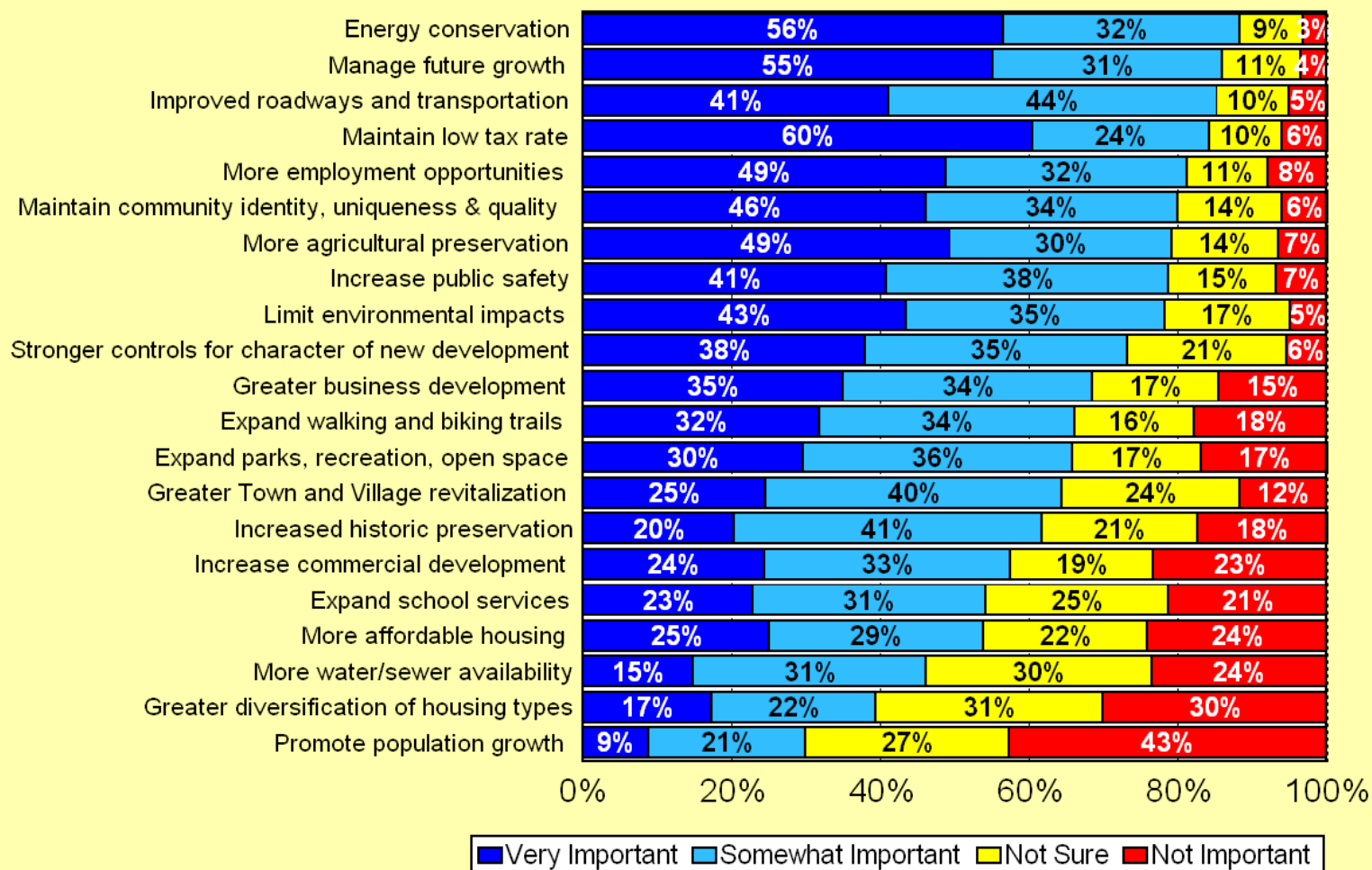


- Multi-municipal steering committee, advisory teams
- Municipal official meetings, stakeholder interviews
- Branding, advertising, marketing
- Website, photo contest, media outreach
- Citizen survey
- Public forums with incentives for attendance (Let's Talk Turkey)
- Meetings-in-a-box, school programs, on-farm interviews

Citizen Survey

Q2. Importance of Various Issues Facing Union County

by percentage of respondents



Vision for the Future

Union County will be a prosperous and beautiful valley in 2030 by:

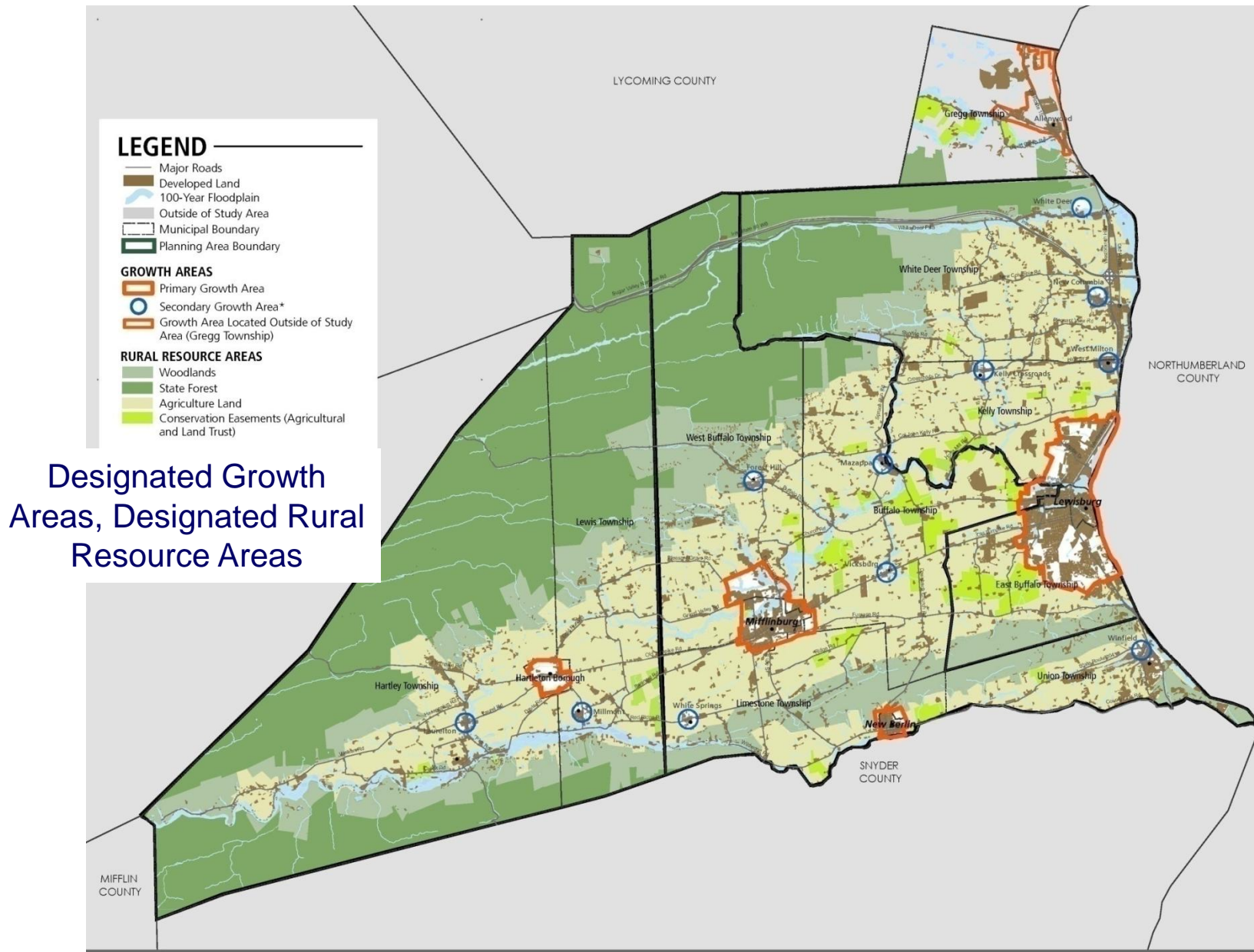
- **Protecting precious natural resources & agriculture**
 - **Supporting sustainable economic growth**
 - **Promoting its unique town & country lifestyle**
- ***Three regional visions will contribute their special strengths to achieving these goals:***

The western region will be a home for rural enterprise and connecting with nature.

The central region will be the heart of Union County's agricultural and small town heritage.

The eastern region will be a center of county government, medical service, and higher education in a town and country setting.

Growth Management Framework



What Could New Development Look Like?



Integrating Sustainability: Principles

- **Focus new development in and around established communities**
 - Promote reinvestment in existing towns and villages
 - Develop in close proximity to existing infrastructure
- **Preserve rural resources**
 - Maintain agriculture and prime farmland soils
 - Preserve sensitive natural features and scenic views
- **Conserve energy**
 - Decrease fossil fuel consumption
 - Reduce automobile use / promote transportation alternatives
- **Conserve fiscal resources**
 - Limit the negative impacts of new development on municipal budgets and community services

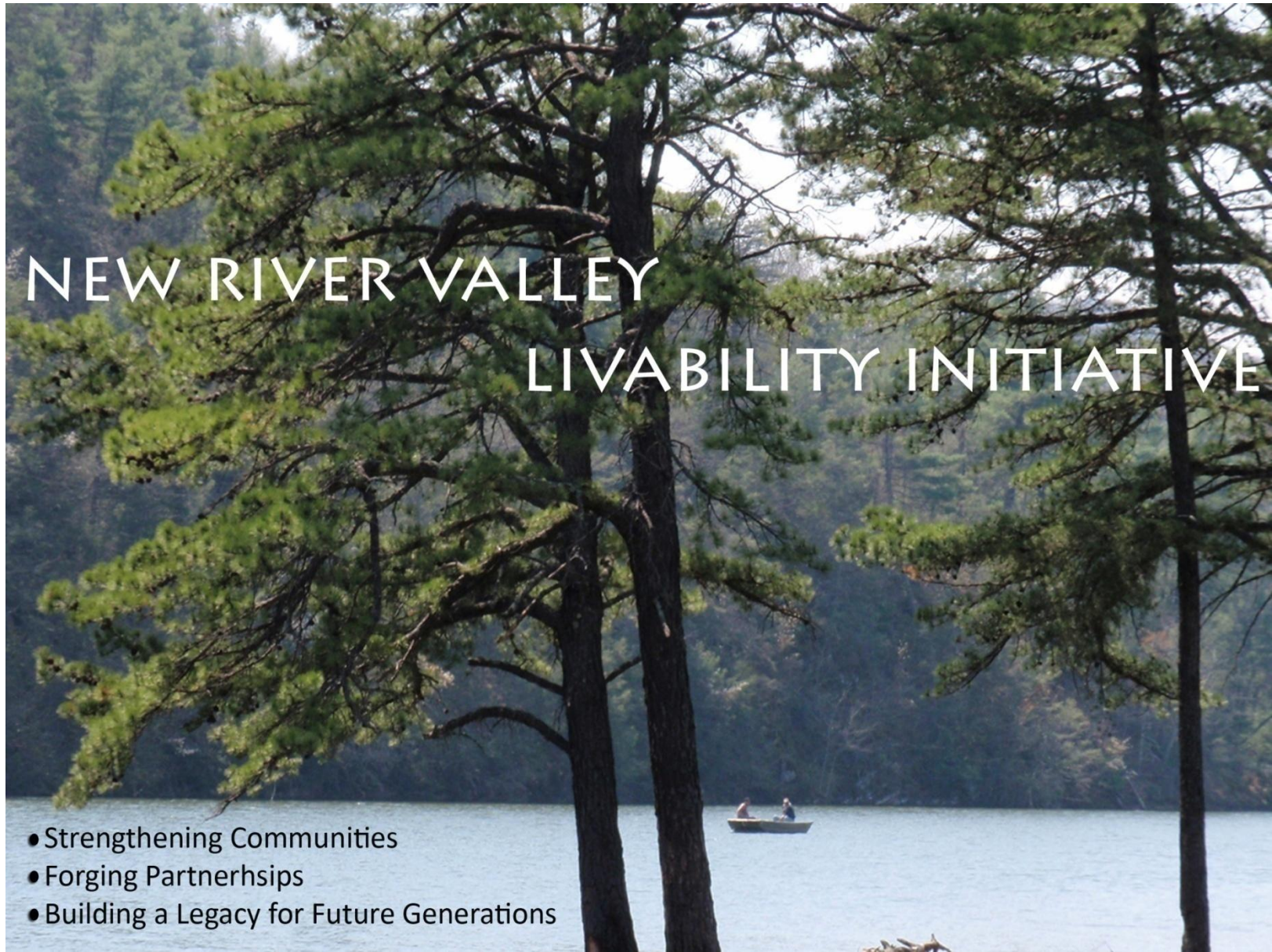
Integrating Sustainability: Keys

Plan Element

Sustainability Key

- | | | |
|------------------------------------|---|-------------------------|
| ▪ Natural & Agricultural Resources | ➔ | ▪ Ecosystem Integrity |
| ▪ Land Use | ➔ | ▪ Mixed Use |
| ▪ Housing | ➔ | ▪ Diversity |
| ▪ Economic Development | ➔ | ▪ Building Local Assets |
| ▪ Transportation | ➔ | ▪ Multi-Modal Choices |
| ▪ Cultural & Historic Resources | ➔ | ▪ Adaptive Reuse |
| ▪ Community Facilities & Utilities | ➔ | ▪ Energy Conservation |

New River Valley Region, VA Livability Initiative

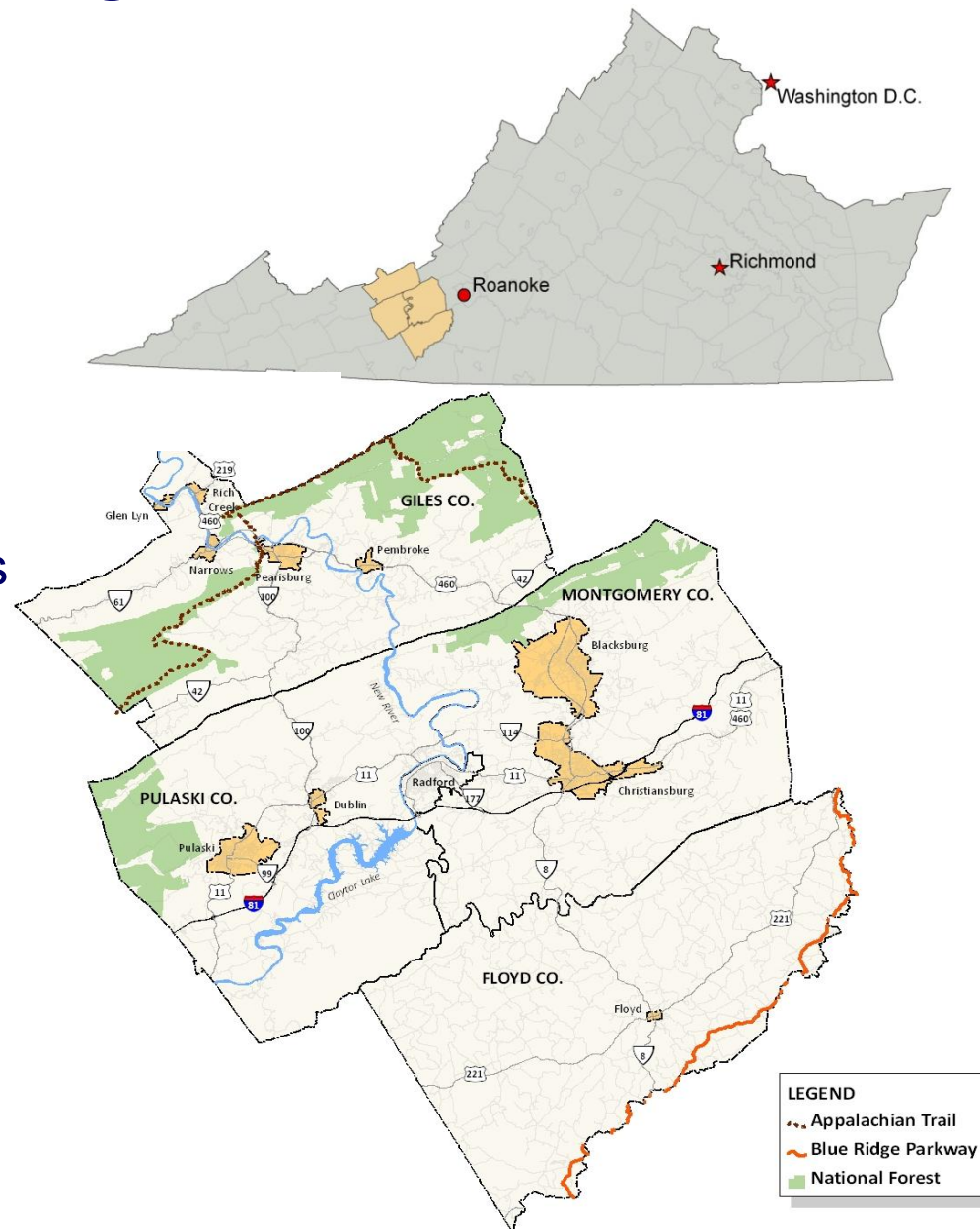


NEW RIVER VALLEY LIVABILITY INITIATIVE

- Strengthening Communities
- Forging Partnerships
- Building a Legacy for Future Generations

New River Valley Region Background

- **Four counties in western VA**
 - 1,457 square miles
 - Population = c. 165,000
 - Largest town = Blacksburg (pop. 44,885)
- **Rural quality of life**
 - Exceptional natural resources
 - Agriculture impacted by suburban development
 - Five larger municipalities, small rural communities
 - High % of residents living in poverty
- **Category 1 RPSD**
 - Regional Consortium led by New River Valley Planning District Commission



New River Valley Region Livability Initiative

- **Big Idea**
 - “Rural Sustainability Hubs....to accommodate future growth without losing identity while creating a new model for planning in a rural region.”
- **Planning Process**
 - Phase 1: Organizational Setup
 - Phase 2: Data Inventory and Trend Analysis
 - Phase 3: Public Engagement and Alternatives Scenarios
 - Phase 4: Plan Integration
 - Phase 5: Plan Adoption and Implementation Strategies



Conclusion: Key Challenges

- How can you tailor the Sustainable Communities program requirements to the unique conditions and needs of your rural region?
 - Communicating with and engaging the public
 - Defining what sustainability means for rural and small town residents
 - Identifying data sets, outcomes, and metrics appropriate to the rural context
- How do you build capacity for implementation through the process?
 - Barriers: limited staff and financial resources, low population densities compared to urban regions
 - Importance of regional collaboration, partnerships, and leveraging resources



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